

ORIGINAL

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA

AUGUSTA DIVISION

FILED
U.S. DISTRICT COURT
AUGUSTA DIV.

2012 DEC 21 AM 10:30
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SO. DIST. OF GA.

LERON ARMSTEAD,

Plaintiff,

v.

FNU BLANT, Correctional Officer II
(Ex. Sergeant), et al.,

Defendants.

CV 112-172

MAGISTRATE JUDGE'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Plaintiff, who is currently incarcerated at Augusta State Medical Prison ("ASMP") in Grovetown, Georgia, brought the above-captioned case pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Because Plaintiff's complaint was filed *in forma pauperis*, it must be screened to protect potential defendants. Phillips v. Mashburn, 746 F.2d 782, 785 (11th Cir. 1984). Pleadings drafted by *pro se* litigants must be liberally construed, Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21 (1972) (*per curiam*), but the Court may dismiss a complaint, or any part thereof, that is frivolous or malicious or that fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e) & 1915A.¹

¹Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(4), a prisoner cannot be prohibited from bringing a civil action because he is unable to pay an initial fee; thus, the Court will proceed to screen Plaintiff's complaint even though he is unable to pay any initial partial filing fee. However, in accordance with the terms of the Consent to Collection of Fees form which Plaintiff signed, he remains liable for the full \$350.00 filing fee.

I. BACKGROUND

Plaintiff names the following as Defendants in this case: (1) Officer Blant, Correctional Officer II; (2) Officer Neighbors, Correctional Officer II; and, (3) the Georgia Department of Corrections. (Doc. no. 1, p. 1.) Plaintiff reports that on October 5, 2012, Defendant Neighbors escorted Plaintiff out of his cell to a cage in the yard, and then placed a “strange inmate” in the cage with Plaintiff, who subsequently assaulted Plaintiff. (Id. at 7.) Plaintiff asserts that he was hospitalized for the night, and that when he returned to ASMP, he was housed in cell 11B1206. (Id.) According to Plaintiff, Defendant Blount stated that he “lost his rank because of the incident concerning [Plaintiff’s] assault,” and also stated that “it was either his rank or his brother [Defendant] Neighbor[s’s] job.” (Id.) Plaintiff alleges that on October 12, 2012, he submitted an informal grievance about the incident and about threats from another inmate. (Id.) Plaintiff avers that Defendant Blount “yelled in the 11B Dorm” that he was not going to do anything for any of the inmates because Plaintiff had written “grievances and complaints.” (Id.) Plaintiff also alleges “failure of proper training” in administrative segregation against the Georgia Department of Corrections. (Id. at 5.)

Plaintiff signed his complaint on November 1, 2012. (Id. at 7.) With regard to utilizing the prison grievance procedure, Plaintiff states that he filed an informal grievance and a formal grievance, and that “parties claim they where [sic] not involved.” (Id. at 3.) Plaintiff states that he did not appeal the adverse decision to the highest level possible in the administrative procedure, but provides no further explanation. (Id. at 4.) In his request for relief, Plaintiff seeks injunctive relief and monetary damages. (Id. at 7.)

II. DISCUSSION

Plaintiff's complaint should be dismissed because of his failure to exhaust his administrative remedies. Section 1997e(a) of the Prison Litigation Reform Act ("PLRA"), Pub. L. No. 104-134, §§ 801-810, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996), provides that "[n]o action shall be brought with respect to prison conditions under section 1983 of this title, or any other Federal law, by a prisoner confined in any jail, prison, or other correctional facility until such administrative remedies as are available are exhausted." 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a). The PLRA's mandatory exhaustion requirement "applies to all prisoners seeking redress for prison circumstances or occurrences." Porter v. Nussle, 534 U.S. 516, 520 (2002). Moreover, the Court does not have discretion to waive the requirement, even if it can be shown that the grievance process is futile or inadequate. Alexander v. Hawk, 159 F.3d 1321, 1325-26 (11th Cir. 1998).

Furthermore, the PLRA also "requires proper exhaustion." Woodford v. Ngo, 548 U.S. 81, 93 (2006). In order to properly exhaust his claims, a prisoner must "us[e] all steps" in the administrative process; he must also comply with any administrative "deadlines and other critical procedural rules" along the way. Id. at 91 (internal quotation omitted). If a prisoner fails to complete the administrative process or falls short of compliance with procedural rules governing prisoner grievances, he procedurally defaults his claims. Johnson v. Meadows, 418 F.3d 1152, 1159 (11th Cir. 2005), *cert. denied*, 548 U.S. 925 (2006).

Also, because exhaustion of administrative remedies is a "precondition" to filing an action in federal court, the Eleventh Circuit requires prisoners to complete the administrative process *before* initiating suit. Higginbottom v. Carter, 223 F.3d 1259, 1261 (11th Cir. 2000)

(*per curiam*); see also Miller v. Tanner, 196 F.3d 1190, 1193 (11th Cir. 1999). Other federal circuits have similarly held that the PLRA does not allow a plaintiff to exhaust administrative remedies while his case is pending. See McKinney v. Carey, 311 F.3d 1198, 1200 (9th Cir. 2002); Medina-Claudio v. Rodriguez-Mateo, 292 F.3d 31, 36 (1st Cir. 2002); Jackson v. Dist. of Columbia, 254 F.3d 262, 269 (D.C. Cir. 2001); Freeman v. Francis, 196 F.3d 641, 645 (6th Cir. 1999); Perez v. Wisconsin Dep't of Corr., 182 F.3d 532, 538 (7th Cir. 1999). Finally, under the PLRA, the Court has no discretion to inquire into whether administrative remedies are "plain, speedy, [or] effective." Porter, 534 U.S. at 524; see also Alexander, 159 F.3d at 1326. Rather, under the PLRA's "strict exhaustion" requirement, administrative remedies are deemed "available" whenever "there is the possibility of at least some kind of relief." Johnson, 418 F.3d at 1155, 1156 (internal quotation omitted).

The administrative grievance procedure applicable in this case is governed by the Georgia Department of Corrections' Standard Operating Procedure ("SOP") IIB05-0001. Once an inmate has unsuccessfully attempted to resolve a complaint through discussion with the staff involved, the administrative remedies procedure commences with the filing of an informal grievance. SOP IIB05-0001 § VI(B). The inmate has ten calendar days from "the date the offender knew, or should have known, of the facts giving rise to the grievance" to file the informal grievance. SOP IIB05-0001 § VI(B)(5). The timeliness requirements of the administrative process may be waived upon a showing of good cause. See id. §§ VI(C)(2) & (D)(2). The SOP requires that an inmate be given a response to his informal grievance within ten calendar days of its receipt by the inmate's counselor; the informal grievance procedure must be completed before the inmate will be issued a formal grievance. Id.

§§ VI(B)(12)-(13).

If unsatisfied with the resolution of his informal grievance, an inmate must complete a formal grievance form and return it to his counselor within five business days of his receipt of the written resolution of his informal grievance. Id. § VI(C)(2). Once the formal grievance is given to the counselor, the Warden/Superintendent has 30 calendar days to respond. Id. § VI(C)(14). If the inmate is not satisfied with the Warden's response to the formal grievance, he has five business days from the receipt of the response to file an appeal to the Office of the Commissioner; the Office of the Commissioner or his designee then has 90 calendar days after receipt of the grievance appeal to respond. Id. §§ VI(D)(2) & (5). The grievance procedure is terminated upon the issuance of a response from the Commissioner's Office. See id. § VI(D).


Here, it is apparent from Plaintiff's complaint that he did not exhaust his administrative remedies prior to the commencement of this case, as is required under the PLRA. Plaintiff signed his complaint less than one month after the incident, without having appealed the denial of his formal grievance to the Office of the Commissioner, as provided for in the applicable Department of Corrections Standard Operating Procedures. See SOP IIB05-0001 § VI. More importantly, Plaintiff admits that he has failed to complete the exhaustion process concerning the claim set forth in his complaint. (Doc. no. 1, p. 4.) Plaintiff provides no reason why, following the denial of his informal and formal grievances, he did not utilize the prison grievance appeal procedure. (Id.) However, in order to properly exhaust, Plaintiff must use all steps of the available exhaustion procedure. Woodford, 548 U.S. at 93. As exhaustion of administrative remedies is a "precondition" to filing an action

in federal court, Plaintiff had to complete the entire administrative grievance procedure *before* initiating this suit. Higginbottom, 223 F.3d at 1261. Therefore, Plaintiff's complaint should be dismissed without prejudice.²

III. CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, the Court **REPORTS** and **RECOMMENDS** that Plaintiff's complaint be **DISMISSED** without prejudice for failure to exhaust administrative remedies and that this civil action be **CLOSED**.

SO REPORTED and RECOMMENDED this 21~~st~~ day of December, 2012, at Augusta, Georgia.


W. LEON BARFIELD
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

²The Court recognizes that the Supreme Court has held that under the PLRA, exhaustion of administrative remedies is an affirmative defense. Jones v. Bock, 549 U.S. 199, 215 (2007). However, if the allegations in the complaint, taken as true, demonstrate that a prisoner's claims are barred by an affirmative defense, the complaint is subject to dismissal for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. Id.; see also Clark v. Georgia Bd. of Pardons and Paroles, 915 F.2d 636, 640-41 (11th Cir. 1990) (explaining that district court may dismiss prisoner's complaint "if [it] sees that an affirmative defense would defeat the action," including the prisoner's failure to exhaust "alternative remedies"). Therefore, because it is clear from the face of Plaintiff's complaint that he failed to exhaust his administrative remedies, the Court can properly recommend that Plaintiff's complaint be dismissed. See Anderson v. Donald, 261 F. App'x 254, 256 (11th Cir.) (*per curiam*), *cert. denied*, 552 U.S. 1245 (2008) (finding that the district court properly dismissed the plaintiff's complaint because the allegations in the complaint sufficed to establish that Plaintiff failed to exhaust his administrative remedies).